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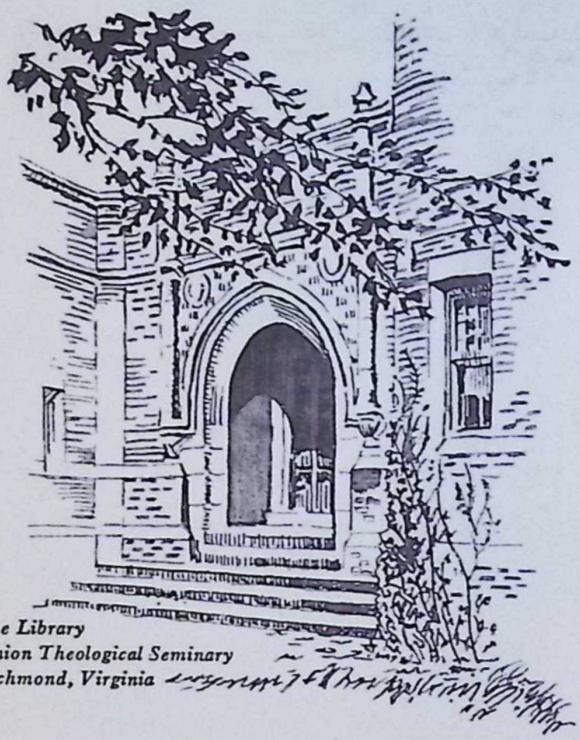

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The Confession of Faith at the Presbyterian Union

Discussed by Professor DeWitt, President Stewart and Professor Johnson.

THE ESTABLISHED STANDARDS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

SHOULD, IN THIS CRISIS BE RE-AFFIRMED AND LEFT UNCHANGED

John DeWitt, D.D., LL.D.
Archibald Alexander Professor of Church History, Princeton Theological Seminary

I received with pleasure the invitation with which I was honored to address this evening the Presbyterian Union. In complying with it I shall state briefly some of the grounds of my conviction, that, in the present crisis of our Church, we shall pursue the wisest policy if, rejecting all proposals to amend, to explain or to supplement it, or to substitute for it a new symbol, we shall hold unchanged our present Confession, and shall direct our undistracted forces to the Christian work to which the new century summons us and in respect of which we are happily and profoundly united.

In order to make clear that this is our wisest policy I ask your attention to the nature of the present crisis, and as related to the system of doctrine embodied in our Confession, conceived both as a theory of the universe and as the teaching of Holy Scripture.

I have been asked to speak on the subject before us, specifically as related to the present crisis. And in this phrase, the present crisis, we come upon a matter of the last importance. For no one of us, I take it, looks upon our Confession as either perfect or incapable of improvement. I can easily conceive of a crisis in the Church, with which we should deal very inadequately if we failed, notwithstanding the difficulty inhering in the work, to amend the Confession or else to formulate a new creed. Were the present period a period of profound and enthusiastic faith in positive religious truths which after deep study and long debate had come to distinct expression in the general consciousness of the Church, then it would be wrong and useless to try to prevent what had already expressed itself in the Church's consciousness from being formulated in the Church's symbols.

Precisely such a period was that of the Nicene Creed. The first age of conflict with unbelief was over. The great apologies for Christianity had been written; the literary victory over the enemies of Christianity had been won. Faith in the Divine Saviour, instead of being eclipsed or even clouded, shone forth with new radiance. Why should not the victorious Church proceed to give scientific form to its triumphant belief? Such also was the period of the Reformation. It was out of positive, vigorous and regnant faith in the formal and material principles of the Reformation—faith which terminated long study and sharp conflict—that the Lutheran and Reformed Confessions of the sixteenth century issued. Like them in this important respect was the golden age of Puritanism in Great Britain, whose ultimate and most influential creed product was the Westminster Confession. The sublime and fruitful idea of the holy God, as the only absolute sovereign, working out in all history his eternal and universal plan, employing means when he chooses, or discarding them and working without means when and where and how he pleaseth—this idea, with its tremendous theological and political implications, had become distinct in the Church's consciousness after long study, and victorious in the State after bloody struggle; and was as regnant in Great Britain in the seventeenth century, as was Justification by Faith in Northern Europe in the sixteenth, or as the essential Deity of the Son of God was in the Eastern Church in the fourth century. There was regnant

faith, and there was a distinct and positive truth in which the faith reposed. The goal was in clear view. Besides a common sense of want, which made a common point of departure, there was a single terminus ad quem, a luminous point toward which the creedal efforts of the Church converged.

Clearly, the present crisis is not at all like those just mentioned. Instead of victorious and positive faith, faith is engaged in a fight with doubt and unbelief, however reverent they may be. Go to the most conservative of divinity schools. Apologetics pervades every department, except that of practical theology; and every professor is militant against some phase of current thought. Go to the schools affected by the prevailing spirit. Again, apologetics in every department; with teachers criticising the old theology and concessive to new speculations. Take up the popular books. If a philosophical layman writes in justification of the foundations of Christian belief, he grounds his argument in a philosophy of doubt. And it is the Gospel for an age of doubt which one of our own clergymen eloquently and with literary grace commends to students about to begin their ministry. I am criticising no theological seminary; and I am not finding fault with either Mr. Balfour or Dr. Van Dyke. I am only trying to set forth the condition which confronts us. The present crisis is at the furthest possible remove from those out of which issued the vital and abiding creeds of the Church of God. The age is one of doubt, not of faith; or, looked at from the point of view of Christianity, it is not constructive, but apologetic. We are in the midst of a conflict, not at its victorious close. And notice how negative is the period regarded from the point of view of the new speculations. Evolution may assert that sin is not guilt, and may pronounce negatively on the exceptional character of Christ; but it has yielded nothing positive which can aid us in construing these views in a Christian system. The new Biblical criticism asserts the Bible's historical untrustworthiness. But the Bible's positive function as a rule of faith it has not even begun to formulate. And as for Ritschlianism, the most it has to tell us is that we have no real knowledge of God; and that our assertions of his self-conscious love and Fatherhood are only judgments of religious value.

Assert, if you like, that these great tendencies of modern thought have many things positive and beneficent in store with which in the future to enrich our Christian belief. Yet the future is not the present. They have not yet produced them. They have done nothing but breed discontent with the old, the traditional and the accepted. It is no time, therefore, if history has any lessons for us, to go into the business of creed-making or creed-mending.

There is, you perceive, no goal in sight. There is no common terminus ad quem. And if this is true of the general trend of modern thought, it is quite as true of the special movement against the Confession of Faith, which had its genesis in the doubts created by these and kindred speculations. Not only is there no intimation of a common goal, but as a church we are much more seriously divided in sentiment than we were a decade since. Then the Church wanted to try amendment. It appointed a large, representative and able committee; and when the committee reported the Church promptly rejected the committee's programme. Are we all for amendment to-day? The Church a year since asked the Presbyteries to report their preferences. And not one but four parties of revisionists appeared. Four parties of revisionists whose relative strength and interrelations it has thoroughly baffled the statisticians and exegetes of the newspapers to determine. The reports went to the Assembly's committee; the Assembly's committee promptly divided into two parties, and by a vote of two to one adopted as their own the very preference which had the least popularity in the Presbyteries.

I submit that this is not a crisis which promises anything of value in the way of a creed statement. Concede that there is the potency; concede even that there is the promise of some valuable contribution to religious faith to come out of the present debates in the future. Yet the future is not the present. It has not come out yet. To formulate a creed statement at present would, at its best, be to take into the system unripe fruit. And unripe fruit is always

disappointing, often painful and sometimes fatal to the organism which attempts its assimilation. The truth is, that the only promising and positive goal before us is that same great system of belief, embodied in our Confession, which we are invited either to emasculate or to set aside.

In this way we are brought to consider in relation to the present crisis the system of doctrine in our present Confession, considered both as a theory of the universe and as the teaching of Holy Scripture.

Science, philosophy and theology are the three great modes of organizing the universe into an intellectual system. Science never goes below second causes. When it does it is no longer science. It "suffers a sea change" and becomes philosophy. For philosophy views the universe as a unity; and the goal it is always seeking to reach is the source and centre of this unity;—the Absolute, the First Cause, the ultimate Ground of all. Now the goal of philosophy is the postulate and point of departure of theology. What philosophy is striving to find theology asserts has been found. Theology starts, therefore, with the Absolute, the First Cause; and it construes the entire universe from the point of view of God. This is the distinction of theology. And it is the glory of the Westminster Confession among theological systems that it is always true to its organizing principle. Its entire construction is determined by its idea of the living and Holy God. It is consistent in that it never fails to theologize. It never forsakes its sublime point of view. The finite universe, angels and men, the law and the Gospel, even the human will are unfolded, never from the standpoint of science and philosophy, but always from the standpoint of God.

And its doctrine of God is clear and determinate. The infinite, personal, holy and loving God, the only absolute Sovereign with a free universal and eternal plan, of which universal history is the progressive unfolding;—this is not only one of its doctrines; it is also the point of view from which it never for an instant moves. It is the theistic system of the universe; the one perfectly consistent system of Theism organized sub specie eternitatis.

Now this is the very point at which our Confession is most vigorously attacked, first, by current religious sentiment, and secondly by current philosophical speculation.

Take current religious sentiment. It distinctly opposes the organization of the Church by a creed; and it especially opposes its organization by a creed constituted by a clearly defined dominating doctrine of God.

Religion, says current sentiment, is one thing and theology is another. It may be true that theology ought to issue in religion. It is not true that religion needs theology to guard or support it. Religion can support itself. Hence the Church, whose precise function is to promote religion, ought not to complicate the situation by committing itself to a definite theology. Thus the New York Evangelist tells us that "there are not a few in the Church who have anticipated the day, not very remote, let us hope, when all creeds shall be relegated to the cloister." Nothing could be more frank, as nothing could be more illuminating. The position taken by those for whom the Evangelist here speaks is that the religious affections and activities are independent of creeds; and that on this ground creeds should be relegated to the cloister. I do not say that all who represent modern religious sentiment would go quite so far. Perhaps in our own Church, in which for centuries the religious life has been closely associated with definite belief, the more widespread feeling is that the creed should be organized from the point of view not of God, but of man; that it should be a practical programme dealing with affections and duties instead of presenting the corollaries of a clearly defined doctrine of God.

The opposition between current speculation and the Confession, considered as a theory of the universe organized by the idea of God, is even more striking and important. For nothing is more obvious than the fact that God is the subject with which modern thought deals by eminence. The Spinozism, which holds that God is the one and only substance the unfolding of whose attributes into the various modes of existence is not free, but necessitated; the Hegelism, which teaches us that God is the Aboriginal Idea, which, unconscious in itself, comes to con-

sciousness by a logical process in finite determinations only; the evolutionist, who tells us that God is the one and only substance, the unfolding which, at every point of space and time, works in enslavement to environment without choice, whether it produces a normal eye on the one hand or cancerous tumor on the other; and the Ritschlianism that teaches that we have no scientific knowledge of God, and that when we say he is love or call him father, we are only uttering judgments of religious value;—these tell us that the crisis of the present crisis is the Doctrine of God. These point us to the centre of the battle.

Against these we have our great Confession—a self-consistent theory of the universe organized by the idea of God, the living God, who is free, who is conscious, who designs, and the unfolding of whose sublime and eternal purpose is universal history. Self-consistent, I say, because, unlike Trent, it never permits sacraments and priestly grace to compete with the living God, and because, unlike Arminius, it never leaves its divine point of view to psychologize about the human will.

Now, I say nothing of the past, I say nothing of what this great system has done in the spheres of government and society. As we know, it has given us civil liberty and self-government. It has given us the popular and the higher education. Here in America it secured independence. It made New England, and it made the Ulster men. It gave us a republican government and a democratic society. It gave us a church without a prelate and a state without a king. But of this I say nothing now. What I do say is, that with it. if we are true to it, if we hold fast by it, if we do not emasculate it, or relegate it to the cloister, we shall again, as we have done before, win the battle concerning the living and personal God. For it is the one self-consistent system organized by that great doctrine; and it has with it the aspirations of the human heart, the hopes of the human soul and the intuitions of the human mind. This is no time to put forth a destructive or a meddling hand against it.

It is only fair to say that all revisionists, if you accept their view of themselves, do not belong to the classes I have been speaking of. Others assert that they glory in the great theory of the universe embodied in the Confession; that all they desire is to harmonize the Confession with Scripture at certain points. Hence they want a committee to explain or to amend or to supplement it, and this in order to make it more Scriptural. This brings me to the Confession and Scripture in the present crisis.

It is difficult to discuss this question; just because no one has formulated an explanation or a supplemental creed. We are asked to favor not a particular explanatory statement, but only the idea of such a statement; not a particular supplemental creed, but only the idea of such a creed. We might very well say to these proposers, write out your explanation and then we can discuss it; write out your supplemental creed and then we can scrutinize it. When your own chaos has, through your own efforts, been transformed into what you regard as cosmos, then, but not till then, will we listen to your proposals. This is the wise method of the State and Federal government. Why should we depart from it in the Church?

Nevertheless, we have before us the work of the former committee; and we have in the newspapers individual plans, which perhaps will enable us to discuss one point, or possibly two points.

We all remember the unfortunate work of the last committee. It is painful for me to speak of it in these terms, since four of its members were able and honored colleagues of my own in different theological seminaries. But what did the committee do in the name of Scripture and of liberality? It began with the chapter on the Scriptures and ruthlessly destroyed the only statement in the Confession which declares the fundamental Protestant doctrine, that the Bible authenticates itself as the Word of God and needs the help of no extraneous evidences. It passed to the chapter on the decree of God. The Westminster divines had so written it as to commit themselves to neither supra nor infra lapsarianism. The committee, in the name of liberality, determined to make the chapter infra-lapsarian and to exclude the supra-lapsarian. With this end in view they went to work. But Holy Scripture tells us of elect angels; and the elec-

tion of an angel could not possibly be construed into an infra-lapsarian scheme, for no elect angel ever fell. What did the committee do? Why, they found the elect angels blocking the way to an infra-lapsarian chapter; and they turned them out in order to save a refinement of scholastic theology. The committee passed to the chapter on effectual calling. Here arose the mysterious subject of the salvation of those dying in infancy. Are all saved? The Westminster divines left the answer to this question free. But they also placed on record the most precious and comforting statement in the whole Protestant doctrine of the Holy Spirit; the statement that the Holy Spirit can regenerate without means, when and where and how he pleaseth. What did the committee do? It first took away the Church's freedom of opinion on this mysterious subject: and, having done that, it emasculated the great and precious doctrine that the Holy Spirit, in his gracious work, is absolutely free to work salvation even without means. Happily for the Church, the committee no longer exists, and its work is buried.

But now another proposal to Scripturalize the Confession is made. The chief thing in this new proposal is the emphasis to be placed on the love of God for all men. We have been told that the verse, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life," means that God loves all men everywhere, indiscriminately, with a gracious love. The evidence of this universal love is that He offers to all men salvation, on the condition of faith in His only begotten Son.

This doctrine with this proof, we are told, must find a place in our standards. But I put it to you:—Does the offer in the Gospel of salvation through faith in Christ prove that God loves all men? If the offer of salvation by faith in Christ be the only proof of the universal love of God, can we with consistency assert it? Why, brethren, the sad, the painful, the mysterious fact is this:—That by the purpose and in the Providence of God, never, since Christ died, has even one-fourth of the human race been told of this offer. The generations of the race on the whole have not had the chance to accept it or reject it. If the doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ is the only proof we have of the love of God for all men, then we not only have no proof of it, but we have proof to the contrary.

The Westminster divines did far better. They chose their words with careful intelligence. They asserted that God offered life and salvation, requiring faith in Christ, to sinners as a class. And they put the duty of bringing this offer to all sinners just where Christ put it, on the Christian Church. But they did not stop there. They also taught that without the Gospel the Holy Spirit can regenerate sinners, adult sinners, when and where and how he pleaseth. And this teaching, the only possible ground of hope for the redemption of heathen whom we have failed to evangelize, the only ground for hope that God's saving love goes out effectively beyond the Church, our last Committee on Revision blotted from the Confession; and did their best to cast out of our synagogue. And, therefore, I put the intellectual consistency, the loyalty to Scripture and the intelligent liberality of the Westminster divines far above those of the last committee and those of the present proposers of revision.

To return, before I close, to the present crisis. This is no time for revision. The real conflict of the hour is between unintelligent chance, necessitated force, and free and intelligent plan, as the constitutive principle of the universe. Chance, force, plan; which of these words intimates the character and describes the activity of God? This is the burning question of the day. In the midst of this tremendous fight shall we, who are all for the free and intelligent plan of the living and holy God, waste our time and spend our force in fighting over its corollaries? Let us wait until we have won the common battle and see eye to eye once more.

Meanwhile let us engage in our common work of missions to the country and the world. If we are faithful to this work, and if we are united in it, the time will come when we shall all see a common goal, for they who do the will of God shall know of the doctrine. Above all let us put on charity. Every one of us has difficulties and perplexities not only with the Confession, but above all with painful and obtrusive facts in the constitution of the universe. Let us wait

on the unfolding of the free plan of the living and the loving God, in faith of him and in charity for each other's difficulties; and let us stop these wasteful strifes for revision, which we are now conducting to the comfort of our common rivals and our common foes.

ENTIRELY NEW STANDARDS

ARE DEMANDED AT THE PRESENT TIME:

Why There Should be a New Creed: What Should be Its Form:

George Black Stewart, D.D., President Auburn Theological Seminary

To defend this thesis it is not necessary to assail the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. I venerate those venerable statements of the faith of our church. They bear the marks of the profound intellectual and spiritual insight of their authors. They, more than any other instrumentality, have made our church what it is. They are the greatest of the creeds of the Reformation. No other Protestant symbol has evoked the admiration of men or has exerted the influence in thought and life that may be justly attributed to these. Their vigor and virility of thought, their straightforward, fearless logic, their splendid system of doctrine have made them famous and mighty. It is their distinction also that they have been the most bitterly assailed and genuinely hated by all the reformation confessions. They are truly great documents, their enemies themselves being the judges. They have made our church the most invincible opponent of the Papacy, the strongest champion of the liberties of the people, the ablest promoter of scholarship, the sternest teacher of Christian ethics.

Nevertheless, we need a new creed.

We have the right to one. The Westminster divines who exercised this privilege themselves would be the last to deny it to others.

"As all synods and councils may err, through the frailty inseparable from humanity," to quote their own language, the constitution of our church makes provision for the amendment of our doctrinal standards. The amendment may be a new statement throughout. The right to formulate a creed carries the right to change it. The Westminster Assembly began its work in an effort to revise the Thirty-nine Articles, but by the time the fifteenth article had been revised it became apparent that the work could be better accomplished by making a new Confession. This the Assembly did. This we may do, in imitation of their example. It is a fundamental principle of Protestantism that there may be progress in our apprehension of truth. Each age has the right to tell in its own way what God has shown it.

We are able to make a new creed.

Our church is not without a faith or the ability to express it. We know whom we have believed and what we believe. We have clear convictions of truth and duty. We still stand for something in the religious thinking of the world, and something positive and real. We have a message and are able to deliver it with emphasis and precision. We know our own mind, and we have the intellectual capacity, the moral earnestness, the spiritual discernment requisite to express our understanding of the truth. A living church is able to write its vital faith.

We ought to prepare a new creed.

1. It is currently supposed that the Westminster Confession does not represent the present faith of our church. We are not taken seriously when we affirm that it does. There may be good reason for this scepticism. But whether with reason or without, the scepticism exists and is well-nigh universal. It is so wide-spread and deep-seated that no amount of affirmation or re-affirmation will remove it. To stand up and solemnly protest that we are correctly and adequately represented by this ancient document exposes us to several charges, not the most serious of which is that of incurable and unreasoning conservatism.

Nor is this situation relieved by a reluctance upon our part to intrust to the church the task of rewriting her faith. Correctly or not this reluctance is attributed to a distrust of the church. So insecure in the affections of our people is the system of doctrine contained in the Confession, so widely have we departed from it, that any attempt at restatement we know, and confess by our fears, would result in radical and disastrous departures from our ancestral faith. Thus our trembling for the ark is interpreted as our

own unwilling acknowledgement that we no longer believe the doctrine of the Confession.

If we wish to convince the world that we have a faith that has reality and definiteness, that indeed we still hold to the system of doctrine taught in the Confession, we must set about formulating it. We must write it out in our own language and handwriting. Then whether men believe it or not, they will at least give us credit for believing it. Our reputation for intellect and moral candor demands that we profess a creed that is unmistakably ours.

2. The simple fact is that the present Confession does not correctly or adequately represent the faith of our church to-day.

Neither in point of view, nor proportion, nor in all its statements, nor in its omissions, is it the creed we would write if we were formulating one. The doctrine of preterition, which beyond controversy is in the third chapter, is abhorrent to most of us and directly contrary to the Gospel as we understand it. The sinfulness of oaths is not as apparent to us as to the Westminster divines. We do not find the Pope in the second epistle of St. Paul to the Thessalonians described as "the man of sin and son of perdition" as did they. We hold a positive doctrine of the salvation of all infants dying in infancy that is contradicted by the plain meaning of the statement in chapter ten about "elect infants." Search the Confession through and you cannot find it even intimated that God loves all men, a cardinal doctrine in our theology. We hold that the central truth of Scripture is John 3: 16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life," but the Confession does not discover this blessed truth within the horizon of divine realities. We are most careful to honor the person and work of the Holy Spirit, but the Confession is silent respecting these. We believe the church has a world-wide mission and is sent forth with a Gospel for all men, but the Confession knows nothing of a universal Gospel or of the great unrepealed command of our risen Lord, "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations."

The Confessional philosophy is not the philosophy that informs the present theology. The science with which it is familiar is so antiquated as to be incredible. The theological terminology in vogue when the Westminster Assembly met and which it freely used is an unknown tongue to-day, except in theological seminaries where it is needed to unfold the Confession.

These facts, so generally recognized, and others also important create an imperative demand for a new and modern creed. A creed that does not need a glossary, a creed that is informed by our own christian philosophy, that is not contradicted in statement or method by our christian science, that does not seriously over-state some of our doctrines and is adequate for the statement of others.

It is little short of criminal, it is in fact essential disloyalty to the truth as God gives us to see the truth, for our church, with its wide influence, splendid heritage, superb equipment in devout and capable scholarship, with its correct emphasis upon clear thinking and exact statement, to offer to our generation, groping about in the dark for some firm doctrinal standing-ground, a creed which so imperfectly declares our present faith and which is so far removed from modern thought and its expression.

There is too much need for explanation, for correcting impressions, for denying logical inferences, for adding new articles, for changing emphasis respecting the Confession, for it to be considered as our creed.

Revision cannot meet the difficulty. It will but mar a noble doctrine, that, because of what it is in itself and what it has wrought through its unmeasured influence in life and letters, deserves better of us. Revision is mutilation. It is a perversion of the testimony of a venerable creed that for two hundred and fifty years has borne noble testimony to the truth as its authors saw it, and ought to be allowed to tell its story without variation until the end. Revision is a mechanical way for the church of one age to express its faith in the terms used by a former and different age.

For example, the strength of the Confession lies in the place and pre-eminence it gives to

God. It magnifies him. It humbles man before his awful majesty. It is essentially a doctrine of God. This doctrine of God runs through the whole document, unifying and dominating it. But it is not the doctrine of God that is believed and taught to-day. The God of the Confession is a sovereign after the notion of sovereignty that obtained in a monarchical country of the seventeenth century. We to-day believe quite as truly in the sovereignty of God, but it is a sovereignty interpreted not in terms of monarchy but of Fatherhood. The sovereignty is emancipated from legalism that it may be restored to moral reality and truth. Our new creed, if it be true to the present faith of our church, would give God the same pre-eminence as does the old. It also would be essentially a doctrine of God, of a sovereign God, of the infinite, all-powerful Jehovah. But to attempt to introduce into the old Confession our present doctrine of divine sovereignty, would be like trying to define family relations in terms of legal procedure. The old wine-skins will not hold the new wine.

Restatement cannot meet the need, unless it be so thorough-going as to be a new creed. For the difficulties are deeper than phraseology. They are in both the form and the substance. Restatement that touches only the form relieves the tension in one direction only, and that, too, not where it is most tense.

If the church decides to meet present difficulties by either revision or restatement, I will accept the decision. But I am persuaded that the wise method of precedure is the courageous and frank one. We should meet the need of our day by a creed made to-day, as the statement of our present faith.

3. We must do this, if we are to fulfil our mission to our own generation.

No church can successfully maintain its right to separate existence in this day of emphasis upon christian unity unless it can show that it has a distinct mission. We have such a mission. Other Reformation churches have their mission; one to preserve the dignity of the sacraments, another to teach the value of order, another to maintain the rights of the emotions and the claims of experiential religion.

Our mission is to magnify the worth of doctrine and to secure its exact and definite statement. We believe that the facts of life—God, truth, goodness, sin, suffering—press upon the soul with such resistless power that one must have some convictions regarding them and some solution for the problems they start. We are not among the number of those who say that men can get along very well without creeds, that what the world needs are deeds not dogmas, that Christianity is a life and not a faith. We hold that convictions underlie conduct, that deeds are determined by doctrine, that a faith gives direction and effectiveness to life. Our testimony has been that there is no antagonism between correct thinking and correct living, and that the way of the truth is the way of life. We are a creedal church. As such we still have a mission to the Church of Christ and the world.

But we are a creedal church without a creed. We must have a creed that is real and vital. A creed that we expound and proclaim, but do not explain, and surely do not explain away. It is not enough to have a creed that is known only in ministerial circles, that is never systematically taught our members, that is practically a sealed book in our churches, and that is rarely referred to except in covert sneer or open attack.

This is an age of intense intellectual activity. "What is truth?" was never asked more frequently by so many with such serious purpose. It has been the mission of our church in the past to answer that question. In the discharge of that mission we found our usefulness and our glory. If we are to find these to-day we must find them in the same way. We must answer the burning question of the souls about us. Is it so, that the best our church can do, when men look up to us and say, "What shall we believe?" is to hand to them a Confession that they will not read, that we do not read, that they do not believe that we believe? Whether this is the best we can do or not, we do not do it. We do not offer to our age in any real way our Confession of Faith as a guide to truth and so a guide to life. Our creed is not a power in the world of thought to-day. It has been in days agone a mighty power, when our ministers preached it, our

members knew it in its length and breadth, and the world plainly saw that it was the living creed of a living church.

We still may minister to the intellectual life of the world, still help to solve its problems and resolve its doubts, still be a power for the overthrow of error and the establishment of truth. But it must be with a creed which we hold with a living grasp and which holds us with hooks of steel.

We are told that the time is unpropitious for the formation of a creed, because this is an age of scepticism. Opinion is in a state of flux. The world has itching ears, which it eagerly but not seriously lends to every new teaching. But what condition could create a more urgent demand upon the one church that says truth is essential to life and character for proclaiming a clear, positive, ringing message? What better business could we be at than putting into words that we are willing to utter in the presence of all men, words which they will listen to, words minted in this year of grace, the truth in Christ as we see it? What more effective service can we render to our generation than guiding it out of the quagmire and the fog to the Rock of Ages and the clear atmosphere of divine truth by means of a creed adapted to its need?

The Westminster Confession was born in a time of stress, and because of the stress of the times. We must render similar service to our age, or we shall miss our opportunity, fall from our high station, fail in our mission.

We owe something to truth as well as to our Confession. We owe something to our generation as well as to the fathers. Our theology must not represent some "Bethel where God has been," but should answer to our honest thought, be the expression of our experience of God.

Prof. Flint says: "A church which rests satisfied with the acquisitions which former generations have drawn from Nature, Providence and Scripture—which does not seek to add to the treasures stored up in its creed, catechisms and dogmatic systems new treasures—may be orthodox, may have espoused as yet no grievous positive falsehood; but its whole attitude toward the truth is a wrong one. It is at heart disloyal and dead to the love of it; and once a church is dead and disloyal to the truth it will soon be dead and disloyal to all that is good."

Our generation asks from us the truth. We believe we know it and love it. Let us show both our knowledge and our love by stating the truth as we see it, under the guidance of the divine Spirit, for the defence of the Gospel and the salvation of men. Thus and thus only shall we keep our place, do our part and widen our influence in the sisterhood of churches.

The form of the new creed is not an unimportant item in this discussion, but it must be briefly treated.

1. It should be positive.

Our theology is vertebral and our creed must be. We believe something, and we believe it with all our heart. We ought to state it with the emphasis of clear conviction. Our message to our age must be a definite, incisive, articulated creed.

2. It should be concrete.

The theology of the Confession starts from a philosophical idea. The theology of to-day starts with a concrete Person and the Deity as known to him and revealed by him. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." This is the declaration of God that our creed must make, that which Jesus the Christ hath shown him to be. We must make God the centre of our creed because he is the centre of our theology. But it is the God of the New Testament, clothed and brought within the range of our vision in the flesh of the God-man, and not the abstract Deity of the metaphysicians. Let the doctrine of election be stated in the terms of daily life and in its New Testament relations rather than in the cold forms of abstract reasoning. Let a father's care for his children shine forth in our doctrine of divine providence, and a son's true penitence breathe through our doctrine of repentance. The form will be the living form of personal truth, an echo, faint but real, of Him who said "I am the truth."

3. It should be brief but comprehensive.

It must contain our system of doctrine, not merely the essentials of the system, and must be long enough for this purpose. But it should be short enough to be convenient for common use. We want this creed not to bind it in sheep

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and put on the shelf, but for use in the churches. It must be portable. Fewness of words, simplicity of expression, a modern dress—these are prime requisites.

4. It should be irenic.

We are a protestant church and our creed must be protestant. We are an evangelical church and our creed must be evangelical. We are a Reformed church and our creed must be true to our Reformed doctrine. We stand for something and our creed must contain something, and if it contains what we stand for, and it ought, it will contain doctrines that differentiate us from others. We cannot avoid this. We tell what we believe, whether others believe it or not. They may be right and we may be wrong, but we can do no other than deliver our message.

But we may give our message in the language of love and peace. We must. The purpose of the message is to win men, not to alienate them. The form of the truth should be winsome. Our creed should be an olive-branch, not a sword; a sanctuary of the truth to which we invite our christian brethren and all who would be disciples of the Christ, not a citadel from which we attack them. While other churches are laboring to bring in a unity in forms of worship, or attitude toward the sacraments, we should labor to bring in a unity in doctrine. This is a unity by far the most important and a unity which we might rightly regard as our mission to believers.

This is the doctrinal change that our church needs. This is the only doctrinal change that will adequately meet the need. Let us courageously and with candor prepare a new statement of our faith, so that we may tell in plain terms with a kindly spirit the truth as we now see it. It will come as a fresh message to a world famishing for a real word from the church. It will relieve the consciences of many, steady the hesitating step of many, resolve the doubts of many. Such a new and living creed would vitalize our pulpit, would arouse our missionary zeal, would widen our influence in the world of thought, would give us a firmer place among the forces that are bringing in the kingdom of God.

IN BEHALF OF SUPPLEMENTAL RESTATEMENT

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Historic coincidences are sometimes remarkable. Two hundred and fifty-eight years ago, the now memorable Westminster Assembly was called together by ordinance of Parliament. In the ordinance convening this body it was expressly declared that the purpose of convening it was "for the vindicating and clearing of the doctrine of the Church from all false aspersions and misconstructions." This is exactly the purpose of the present movement in our own Church. And history repeats itself.

Those learned and godly divines proceeded at once to a textual revision of the then existing doctrinal standards—the Calvinistic "thirty-nine articles" of the Church of England. After long labor on this method of revision the effort was abandoned. So our own Church to-day first undertook the work of textual revision of her Confession, and after long labor also abandoned it. And history again repeats itself.

Shall the historic parallel continue? Our Westminster Fathers never turned again to textual revision, but proceeded to the construction of a new Creed, and after two years and more of prayerful consideration, profound study and masterful debate, they wrought out and presented to both houses of Parliament the Confession of Faith that ever since has held an unchallenged, if not matchless, place of honor among the Creeds of Christendom.

Shall we go and do likewise, and thus make history still again repeat itself?

If, after two and a half centuries under this revered and historic Confession, and after having tried the textual revision of it without success, we should now undertake the construction of an absolutely new Creed and for a purpose absolutely identical with the purpose for which those learned and godly divines were called together: to wit, "the vindicating and clearing of the doctrine of the Church from all false aspersions and misconstructions," we should be exactly in line with the Westminster Fathers and the historic parallel would be complete.

I am barred by the imposed courtesies of the

hour from either speaking against this method of change, or in its behalf. I am bound to say, however, that this restriction put upon me by your Committee is in entire accord with both my preference and my conviction. I am persuaded there is at present a better way of ordering this matter than by substitution.

Three other methods of clearing the doctrines of the Church from misconstruction have been suggested for consideration, viz.: by explanatory statement, covering only three or four sections; by a supplemental restatement of the system in briefer and simpler form and for a better understanding of it; and by textual revision.

All the four proposed methods of change, it may be well here at the very outset to state, have two things in common. They all—new Creed, explanatory statement, doctrinal restatement and textual revision—provide for additional articles concerning the Holy Spirit, Missions, and the love of God for all men. And they all stipulate that the integrity of our doctrinal system shall not be impaired. To this extent there is perfect agreement. I simply ask you to grasp for a moment the significance of this agreement. By whatever road we go toward change, we enrich our Creed with these great thoughts of God, and keep true to our old faith. How this should allay suspicion and hush unseemly strife! Brethren of our beloved Church, does not this make it meet that we should rather be clasping hands and joining hearts and thanking God, than bumping heads and hugging doubts and hurling epithets.

Of the first and second of these Creedal changes, viz: by new Creed and by explanatory statement—it is not my province now to speak, and any further reference to either must be only incidental in the progress of this discussion. Of the third, textual revision, I shall only so far speak as to give briefly the reasons urged in its behalf. Your Committee have requested me to do this, and I most cheerfully comply.

Among the arguments in its support are the following:

1. It goes at once and straight to the very points in controversy, and deals with the actual text, whose meaning and scripturalness are challenged.

2. It leaves the great body of the Confession in the form in which it was originally written, and is so far at least conservative of the historic past.

3. It preserves the order of thought which has always given a logical sequence to the successive articles of our faith and which, to many, has been the strength and glory of our doctrinal system.

4. It opens the door to those few but important additions to our doctrinal standard, which, through more light on God's Word, are felt by many to be vital to a complete doctrinal system of Gospel truth, and which are found wanting in our present Confession.

Some of these are common to both revision and restatement. Of these I shall speak more at length as I now pass to the reasons why we should add to our existing standards, in briefer and simpler form, a supplemental restatement of doctrine, that shall more plainly indicate what the confessional system is, which we have officially accepted and adopted, and for which we want no substitute.

1. Restatement respects the very wide and deep rooted feeling in our Church that the old, revered, historic text of our Confession should not be tinkered with, or have its visage marred by change. Something, say what we may, will always be due in this world to sentiment. To ignore it or seek to sneer it away, or stamp it out, is to strike a blow at some of the most sacred, as well as subtle and mighty forces in social and religious life. Association is a tremendous thing in spiritual dynamics. He who has no reverence for the past will never make a past worth revering. It is therefore a strong point in favor of the method of change I am appointed to present, that it keeps the textual integrity of the old Confession.

2. Restatement respects a very prevalent desire that Revision seeks to satisfy. For it adds a clear positive statement of the special truths that have been so often misunderstood and called in question.

3. Restatement secures what "explanatory statement" would secure, and yet secures it in a more direct, simple, and complete way. For explanation of a seemingly severe or extreme statement has the air of weakness and apology,

which a frank and positive expression of the truth would avoid. If a truth is overstated or obscurely stated, or put in such nexus or form as to mislead and vex the Church, why go to explaining it when by a simple restatement we can let the truth tell its own story? We do this in other matters. If we find verbal expression of principle or fact persistently misleading, we do not go on explaining and explaining it. Are we misunderstood? We will restate the truth, so that if possible we cannot be misunderstood. This is almost the demand of honesty and straightforwardness. To say that this must not be looks very much like making a fetich of a verbal form.

4. Restatement keeps the old and fine form of subscription to the doctrinal standards undisturbed. This subscription form is broad, yet definite, clear and satisfactory. Doctrinal restatement will not change by one iota either the letter or the spirit, the form or the meaning of the subscription. We do not now subscribe to the ipsissima verba of the Confession, and we shall not then. We do subscribe to "the system of doctrine" contained in the Confession, and we shall then subscribe to "the system of doctrine" contained in the Confession. And the exact system contained in the Confession now will be the exact system contained in the Confession then. No one is clamoring for a looser subscription or a changed system. Restatement of doctrine provides for neither, and is opposed to both. The doctrinal system is not taken out of the Confession by restatement, but is left imbedded there. It is not changed by restatement, but simply made more clear.

Obviously, therefore, by doctrinal restatement we are not laying aside the old Confession or the old faith. Simplifying a truth is not rejecting it. Clarifying a doctrinal system is not putting it on the shelf.

5. Restatement makes inviting and orderly room for the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The doctrine is in part already in the Confession. But only in part, and not distinctly formulated, but distributed here and there through the Confession. We must needs go in search of it to find it, just as we must to find it in Holy Scripture, picking up the fragments now in this chapter, now in that. But the distinct and specific object of a Creed is to articulate doctrine in a compact and definite form. This dispensation is peculiarly and conspicuously the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. He is peculiarly related to the believer. Peculiarly, his is the presidency of this world-wide mission movement. He is the divine substitute of the divine Master, for its leadership. To have all this, and all else pertaining to his person and office and work summarized and articulated in articles of faith would be to honor the Spirit even as we have honored the Father and the Son. And the silence of our Confession here, when at so many points its utterance is full and clear, is strange indeed.

6. Restatement provided fit occasion and place for the dotrine and duty of making disciples of all nations. These have no voice whatever in our present Confession. Little were those learned and godly divines of Westminster concerned about the heathen world. They put no cry from Macedonia down in their Creed, for they heard no cry. Even more than a century later, when young Carey was inquiring about our obligations to the heathen world, you will remember he got for answer, "When the Almighty is ready to convert the heathen, he can do it without your help or mine."

The great missionary order with which Christ closed his earthly ministry, and that sent his immediate disciples everywhere turning the world upside down, seemed to be a forgotten sound amidst the roar of the battles God's saints were waging for the truth in the Westminster days. They saw truth imperiled, and sturdily, like heroes of a heavenly commission, they fought and bled and died for it. They stated much of God's truth with bold and matchless clearness, and they produced what has been well termed "the consummate flower of the Reformed symbols." But they forgot their marching orders! They heard no inspiring and eager word of evangel and conquest. And when they made the Creed of Westminster, as to any transcript of God's mind relative to vast and perishing heathen harvest fields they were dumb! To the command of the great Commission, and to the cry of heathendom they answered not a word.

Brethren, in the dawn of this greater mission-

ary century, let us break this sad silence of our Creed. How can we stand quibbling about changing our Confession, and refuse to let into it this great missionary doctrine and duty of world-wide discipling? And surely no better place can be made for this last order of our Master than in the brief restatement of our faith which we may lift to the sight of our bannered host and fling before the new century as our conviction, our testimony and our battle cry.

7. But restatement comes to its chief crown and glory in the superior possibilities it furnishes for setting forth the Gospel in some world-wide aspects and relations.

Across our Confession could justly be written "The Gospel for the elect only." I say this with the profoundest respect for the Fathers, and in the fullest appreciation of the doctrine they wrought out—its orderly succession, its masterly definitions, its grasp of the deep things of God, its spiritual reverence, its exhibition of the sovereign, changeless, eternal purpose, and its consummate exaltation of man redeemed. But it was written under the absolute dominance of one idea—the doctrine of predestination, based on the unconditioned sovereignty of God. So Christ is Mediator for those, and those only, who were "given him from all eternity to be his seed." So those thus predestined, "and those only," are effectually called, and those only are justified. And so on down through the successive chapters; the justified are adopted, the adopted are regenerated and sanctified. The grace of "faith" is given only to "the elect." The perseverance of the saints to the end "depends upon the immutability of the decree of election." This is the logical succession. The remainder of the Confession pertains only to the duties, obligations, privileges, relations and final salvation of those thus chosen from all eternity to be Christ's seed; except so far as "the rest of mankind" get incidental notice, and at length are given over to everlasting death.

I do not cite this rigid order of thought to condemn it. I do not for one moment arraign the doctrine of divine election. I believe in it, and in all the issues of it. And for the Gospel's abounding and super-abounding fullness to the elect, I thank God! But to shut it up to the elect is to take away something of its great glory. And because the Confession does this I plead for a restatement of our faith that will better keep the Gospel balances.

There are three great truths of Scripture that are among the peculiar glories of the Gospel of the Son of God. God's love for a lost world, Christ's compassion for a lost world, and the Gospel universals for a lost world. If these are not in the Scripture, nothing is in the Scripture. If these are not a part of the good news we are commissioned of God to tell, then there is no good news to tell. But they are not in our Presbyterian Confession of Faith—not one of them.

Go search our Confession for an unequivocal statement of God's love for all men as sinners. You will not find it. You will not find set forth God's goodness in creation, and God's goodness in providence; you will find God himself set forth as "most loving, gracious, merciful, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin;" but not a word under "creation" or "providence," or the "covenant with man," or "Christ the Mediator;" not a word anywhere that sweeps out beyond the elect and tells of God's love for a dying world.

Other Calvinistic Creeds of Christendom find room for this white lily of God. But if shut up to our Westminster Confession, you would not know, without a Bible, that such a fair flower of divine grace had ever bloomed.

So, too, with Christ's compassion for the lost. See him seeking the lost sheep. See him in the parable of the Great Supper, seeking to "compel" the lame and halt and blind to come in. He did indeed say that those bidden, who refused, "should not taste of his supper." But they were bidden. He wanted them to come in. He used a kind of loving violence to get them in. See him weeping over the non-elect, as his heart went out in the sad lament, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, and you would not? Henceforth, your house is left unto you desolate." Often he "would," when they "would not." This was his attitude toward those that were saved and toward those that perished; seeking, yearning for, weeping over, bent upon rescuing, not only "the elect," but the non-

elect—the city that was already doomed. Go to any chapter in our Confession and see if you can find this Christ there doing this thing. Is the love that is locked up by every possible device of words, and held in binding and restricted speech for God's elect—is this love all the love than was in Christ's heart? If not, then let us dare open the door of our Confession and get more love in.

And the Gospel universals—how they abound in Holy Scripture! But not one of them has a home in our Confession. Those Westminster Fathers, in writing down their Creed, never let slip a "whosoever will," or an "every one that thirsteth," or an "any man," or an "all ye that labor"—blessed latitudes of speech that Peter and John and Paul and the Master allowed their lips at almost every turn. In all the text of our Confession there is not one sure word of testimony that Jesus Christ "tasted death for every man" (Heb. xxi. 9), or that he is "the propitiation for the whole world" (1 John ii. 3), or that "God our Saviour willeth that all men should be saved" (1 Tim. ii. 4). Neither the universal provision of the Gospel, nor the universal offer of the Gospel, nor the universal invitation of the Gospel, finds a voice in the Confession from the opening chapter on Holy Scripture to the closing chapter on the Last Judgment.

To bring this matter to the test! Imagine a sinner come to you who has wallowed in iniquity, his heart a nest of unclean birds, his face marred all over with the hoof-prints of appetite and lust.

The Spirit of God has taken hold of him, and he is asking what we have in our Confession of Faith for a poor wretch like him. You tell him of Christ the Mediator offering up the sacrifice of himself to God. "Did he die for me?" he asks. The answer is on your lips, "He tasted death for every man." "But can God care for a poor old wreck like me?" You answer, "God so loved the world, that whosoever believeth shall not perish." But you go to your Bible for your answers; not to your Articles of Faith. Think of it! A Confession of Faith—and not an article in it for a poor smitten, weary, heavy laden, awful sinner like that.

Men of God, must we not mend our Faith?

But how? My contention is that a restatement of our doctrinal system, brief and clear, will fit into our accepted standards with a marvellous adaptation. For it will give these great truths of God an order and proportion and perspective and emphasis born of the better knowledge we have to-day of the Word of God. Eternal truths do not change, but their relations and proportions and emphasis do. More light changes the appearance of a landscape, throws some things in shadow, brings other things more fully in view, but it does not take away a single essential of the landscape. Now, neither revision nor explanatory statement can touch these splendid possibilities of doctrinal restatement. Proportion and perspective are beyond their reach. Explanatory statement can give us the force of a "footnote." An additional chapter or two can give us the benefit of an "annex." But brief doctrinal restatement will be to the old Confession something like what the Shorter Cathechism is to the Larger. It will go alongside the old Creed, its exponent and simplifier.

Here, then, are my reasons for a brief supplemental restatement of our doctrinal system:

1. It keeps the textual integrity of the old Confession.

2. It secures what revision secures, without altering the text to secure it.

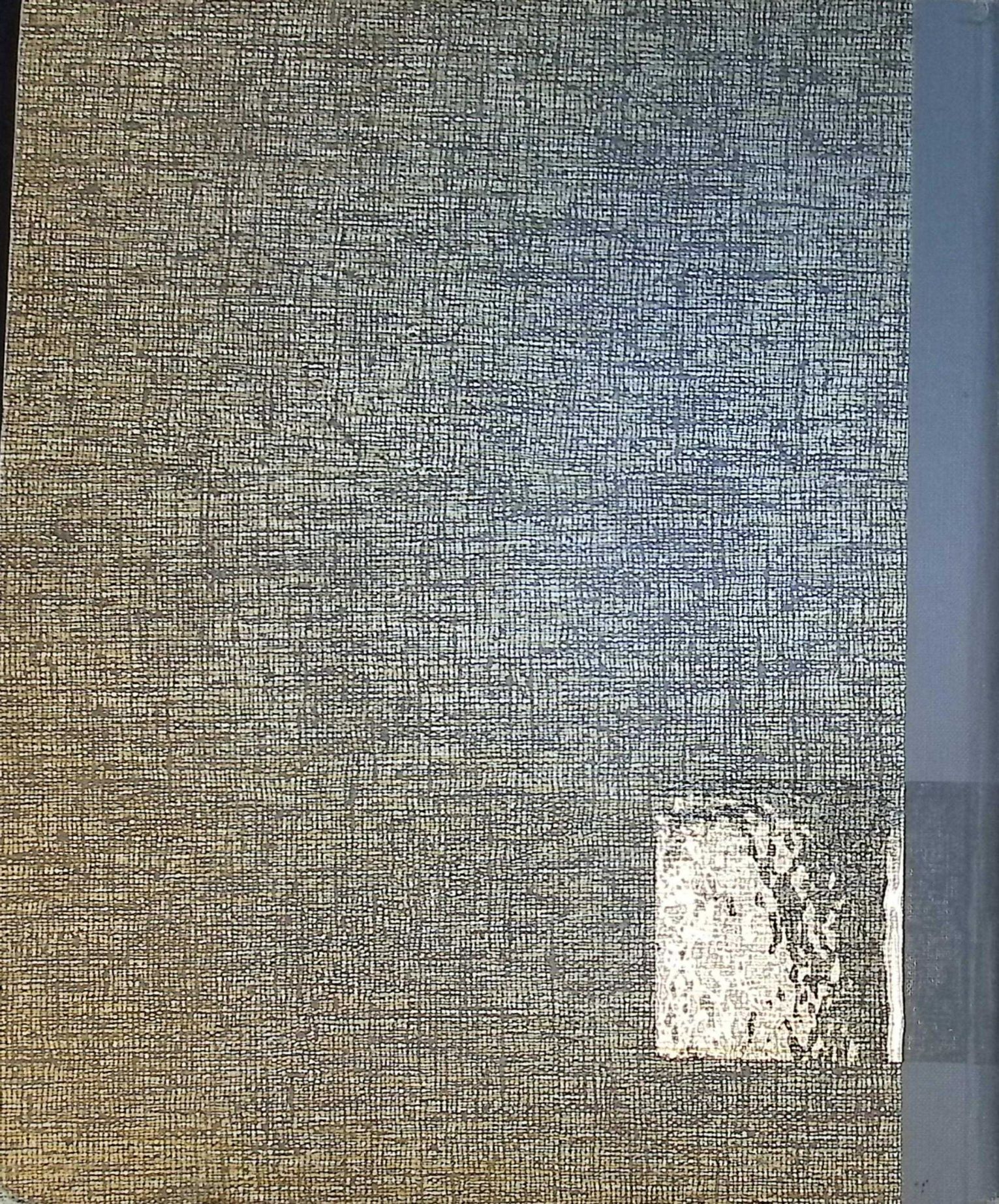
3. It secures what explanatory statement secures by simply letting the truth so tell its own story that no explanation is needed.

4. It keeps the old and fine form of subscription, which does not tie us to the ipsissima verba of the Confession.

5. In common with the other proposed methods of Credal change, but with better opportunities for arrangement, it provides for the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and of Missions.

6. It makes inviting room for God's love for a lost world and allows a coloring and proportion and perspective and emphasis more in accord with the tone and impress of Scripture, without the surrender of a single essential feature of our accepted Confession system of doctrine.

7. And finally it puts our system in such form, so briefly, so simply, so clearly, that any wayfaring man may read it, and learn what

Presbterians believe, and that what we believe will be more widely not only "known and read," but loved of men.

Thus restatement will have in it all the massive supporting pillars of our priceless temple of truth. Its foundation stones will be the same old foundation stones, upon which all superstructure of evangelical and Reformed faith is built. Unconditioned absolute sovereignty, predestination, gracious eternal election, effectual calling, final glorification, they will all be there, and side by side with these the blessed doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the inspiring eager word of world-wide evangel, all put in Scriptural proportion and perspective, and bathed throughout as they are bathed in Scripture with God's ineffable and immeasurable love.